

The Christian Virtue of Hospitality
Selected Scriptures
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According to a poll of 2,000 Americans, it takes the average person just 32 days to break their New Year's resolution. That's February 1st, so you can kind of see how you do against the average. But as we begin this new year, I want to encourage all of us individually, and collectively as a church, to make a resolution. I want us together to make a New Year's resolution that we wholeheartedly intend to keep. I want all of us to pursue a Christian virtue this year, that frankly many Christians don't even know is a virtue. It's the virtue of hospitality.

Now let me first of all say a couple of things. One, we will return Lord willing to our study of Matthew next week, but I think this is important. Secondly, let me say that I'm not addressing this because the elders and I think this is a problem in our church. On the contrary, I think it's always been a strength of our church. But we really think it's important to address this theme, in my mind, for three reasons. First of all because as our church continues to grow, we don't want to lose this distinctive but we want to continue to excel still more. Some of you who are newer, you need to buy into this distinctive.

Secondly, as our culture continues to drift toward selfish isolation, we don't want the church to reflect that same mindset. You see there are tendencies in our culture at large that are encouraging, that are feeding, selfishness and isolation and are discouraging open, caring hearts for other people. What are those tendencies in the culture? Well, there are a lot of them, but let me just mention a couple of them. One such tendency is our culture constantly tells you that you should only surround yourself with people like you and who will benefit you. Christian, that's a lie from Satan himself. That's not Christianity. That's Satanic deception. Another tendency in the culture is the suburbs. Now I live in the suburbs as many of you do. They are a blessing in many ways. But the suburbs with our drive-in garages and our cul-de-sacs can unwittingly foster isolation. It's hard. It's hard in my neighborhood to

interact with my neighbors because we all drive into our garages and close the garage and walk in our houses. That unwittingly fosters that kind of mindset. Sociologists tell us that social media, in spite of its promise, actually breeds loneliness, selfishness, and isolation. Why? Because it encourages us to interact and connect with people digitally but not to connect with the real people that are physically in our world. We don't want to follow the culture. We want to be different.

A third reason for studying this theme today is that as today's church, (I don't mean our church, but the church at large) as today's church continues to drift from Scripture, we don't want to follow its example by ignoring a clear biblical virtue. You see the Christian landscape is absolutely littered with pragmatic churches. Many of you come from pragmatic churches before you came to Countryside. And, understand this, that pragmatic churches typically lack a biblical ecclesiology. That's a theological word that means "a biblical doctrine of the church." They don't know what the Scripture says about how church is to be done and, frankly, they are just not that interested in doing it God's way. Instead, pragmatic churches promote, either intentionally or unintentionally, the church as a place of personal fulfillment. Churches are filled across the DFW area this morning with people who are after what they can get. It's all about them and what they can absorb and how they can benefit. Unfortunately, maybe you came with that mindset. That's not church. Pragmatic churches encourage people to think of church somewhat like a restaurant. You know, we all enjoy restaurants. Think of it like this. You choose one based solely on your personal taste. You come and go based on your personal desires and schedule. You arrange your surroundings when you are there in order to protect your personal space and your personal privacy. And without commitment, you feel free to come and go based on your personal plans. Or, let me use a different analogy. Some of you will get this if you've ever either watched a Dodgers game or been in California. Sadly, there is a tendency in pragmatic churches to be like LA Dodgers fans. To arrive late; to leave early for your personal convenience and for your personal privacy. To have no concern for the team but only about your own entertainment.

The New Testament, however, describes the local church as a family. Look around you. If you are a part of this church, or whatever church you are a part of, in God's design that is family to you. In fact, Jesus said in some cases believers will be closer to you than your actual family. And individual Christians are members in that family with real relationships. And frankly you say, "Well I'm new to the church. I don't have those relationships." Even when there aren't yet real relationships, in a genuine Christian's heart, there's a desire for those relationships. And one of the main ways--don't miss this--one of the main ways that Christian relationships are formed and grow is through the virtue of Christian hospitality.

I want to start this morning in Romans chapter 12. We'll come back here several times before we're done. So, you can mark it if you want. Romans chapter 12, let's start in verse 9. Paul is talking about the effects of the gospel. Because you've believed the gospel, what difference should that make? This is the application of the gospel. Beginning in Romans chapter 12 and running through the end of the letter. And here's one application, verse 9. It's love.

Let your love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, (Now watch verse 13. Here are expressions of love.) contributing to the needs of the saints and practicing hospitality.

What I want us to see this morning is that hospitality is a biblical virtue rooted in the character of God; and therefore, required of every true believer. But before we can, as Paul says here, pursue this virtue, we first have to understand what the Scripture teaches about it, and that's what I want us to do this morning.

Think of this as a classroom this morning. Now I'm not going to use a single passage. We're going to look at a number, but I want you to get your arms around what the Bible says about this virtue of hospitality. So, we are going to consider several specific insights about biblical hospitality. First, let's begin in the obvious

place with “The Definition of Hospitality.” What are we talking about? Let’s start with the English word because the English word is a good translation of the Greek word. What does the English word hospitality mean? Here’s Webster’s: “the friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers; the quality or disposition of receiving and treating them in a warm, friendly, generous way.” That’s a good definition. But our English word is based on and translates a Greek noun hospitality in the New Testament. That word is philoxenia. It’s a compound word that literally means “a love of strangers.” That’s what the word hospitality means, as you saw in our text. It is “a love of strangers.” You see although we are to open our hearts and our homes to friends and to those we know. Technically, that’s not New Testament hospitality. Instead, here’s a definition: “New Testament hospitality is receiving and treating Christians we don’t know or at least we don’t know well in a warm, friendly, generous way.” That’s the virtue of Christian hospitality.

Now a second specific insight we need to understand as we are getting going is “The New Testament Demonstration of Hospitality.” What does hospitality look like on the pages of the New Testament? There are four primary expressions. Let me just give them to you. In the New Testament, the practice of hospitality including first of all: “Hosting the church (or the ministries of the church) in your home.” For example, in Romans 16 verses 3-5, Paul writes as he greets the people in Rome that he is writing to:

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus;
who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I
give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

And then he says this: “Greet the church that is in their house.” They had opened their home for the church to meet there. This was an expression of Christian hospitality. Why do I say that? Because in Romans 16:23, he greets another church in a man’s house. He says, “Gaius, host to me and to the whole church (from where he is writing) greets you.” Now the word he uses for host there is related to the word hospitality. So, “open your home for the church,” that is an expression of hospitality. 1 Corinthians 16:19, “Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord

with the church that is in their house.” Philemon 2 speaks of the church in Philemon’s house. So, one expression in the New Testament of hospitality was to open your home (because there weren’t buildings obviously for churches at that stage) for the church to meet there.

Second expression is “Hosting a Christian traveler in your home.” I’ll look in a moment at Hebrews 13:2. Let me just quote it now. He says, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers.” In context, in Hebrews 13, he is saying as people come through your area, through your community, make sure that you show them hospitality. Now why didn’t Christians just stay in the first century version of hotels, in the inns? Well, sometimes they did, but rarely did Christian believers in the first century stay in inns. Why? Because they were often unavailable. There weren’t that many of them. There were often great distances between them. Secondly, they were often unsafe. You spend the night and have your things stolen. They were unwholesome. Often, they attracted the worst elements of culture. And, they were even unaffordable for many Christians when there were paying inns. So, Christians opened their homes for Christian travelers. That was one way to express hospitality.

Thirdly, and this gets more to the everyday life of believers, you express hospitality when you engage in “Meeting the basic needs of others.” In Mark chapter 9 verse 41, Jesus says, “Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.” The most basic expression of meeting the physical needs of someone else is an act of hospitality and is worthy, Jesus says, of reward. He Himself modeled that powerfully in John 13. You remember at the Upper Room the night before His crucifixion, He basically was the host of the meal. And when none of the disciples would assume the role of washing the feet of the other disciples, as was typical in hospitable homes in that day, Jesus Himself did what? He got up and did it Himself. He showed the heart of a host’s concern for his guest. John 13:14, He said:

If I the Lord and Teacher washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you should do as I did to you.

Obviously, it means we're to be open to menially serving other Christians. We're willing to get our hands dirty, if you will, to care for other Christians. But, in the context, this is an act of hospitality that wasn't done, and Jesus does it. And He says, "I want you to express this."

And then finally, the New Testament demonstrates hospitality in "Enjoying meals together in one another's homes." I'm going to deal with this text more at our conference coming up, so I'll just mention it. Acts chapter 2 verse 46, the church in Jerusalem, 3,000, how did they live? Listen to Acts 2:46: "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple." They went twice a day, if they lived in Jerusalem, for prayer and for the sacrifices that were offered there as a respectful way of what Christ had done, commemorating what He had done. "And breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart." That's what Christians from the very beginning did. When Christians get together for fellowship, spiritual fellowship, what's always involved, or almost always involved? Food. You know, it's coffee and donuts. It's a meal. It's dessert. But we get together around food. And that's part of what is involved in hospitality. So, that's what it looked like in the New Testament times and should look like today.

Now that brings us to a third specific, and this is key: "The Importance of Hospitality." Why should this matter to you? Let me give you several really important reasons. It's important first of all and most importantly because it is actually "Rooted in God's Character." Hospitality is true of God. The virtue of hospitality finds its source in the character, the disposition, and even the actions of our God. He is generous and gracious in the way He hosts His people. Let me take you back to the first biblical example. Turn back to Exodus chapter 24. It is at Mount Sinai. This is what we read in Exodus 24:9:

Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (his sons), and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel.

God in a gracious act of condescension, let them see something of Him; not His full face. They would have been incinerated. But some expression of His presence.

And under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel.

Why? Because He had invited them to do this. And notice how this ends. Verse 11: “And they saw God, and they ate and drank.” What’s going on here? This is a feast initiated by God Himself. If you go back to verse 5 of this chapter, they presented the peace offering, and the peace offering was to be accompanied by a meal as if you were having a meal of fellowship with God. That’s what’s going on here. So, following the peace offering, Moses, Aaron, and his sons, the seventy elders of Israel had a meal in God’s presence, at His invitation, picturing fellowship and communion with Him. But in this, you already see the generous nature of God’s heart.

Fast forward to the most famous Psalm in the psalter, Psalm 23. You remember verse 5 says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” I preached through this Psalm. I think that’s looking ahead to the future when in God’s presence, we as His people are vindicated as His sheep, as truly His. With a meal. The celebration. The feast. And then he adds this: “Surely goodness and steadfast love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” There’s the ultimate expression of hospitality. God allows us to live with Him, not for a day or two, but forever.

In Isaiah 25 verse 6, Isaiah describes the future millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, and he writes this will happen: “The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine.” God’s going to throw a feast for His people. This is the nature of God. This is His heart. Jesus alludes to that same event

in Matthew 8:11. He says, “I say to you, that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”

But you see the generosity and the gracious hospitality of God in that passage in John 14 where Jesus says in John 14:2; you remember what He says:

In My father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; but I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

There’s the ultimate act of hospitality. God renovates His house as it were to make room for you, Christian, forever. Revelation 19:9 “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” The feast. You see what I want you to get from these passages is that it is God’s nature. It is part of the perfection that is true of God to be a gracious, generous host of His people. And so, when we express hospitality, we are merely expressing that which is rooted in the character of our God Himself. In fact, God even pictures the invitation to salvation that’s found in His Son. He pictures that as an invitation to a great feast. Matthew 22, you remember in the parable Jesus tells, He says to the servants, “Go out and invite everybody to come. Invite them to come to the feast for My Son.” That’s the expression of the heart of God. If you’re here this morning and you’re not a follower of Jesus Christ, while in one sense God is your enemy because you have made yourself at odds with Him. In another sense, He has openly, graciously invited you to come to the feast that is salvation. But you have to come His way. In that parable Jesus tells in Matthew 22, there’s a man who gets in and he doesn’t have a wedding garment on. Now, that wasn’t something he came up with. Because they were all invited in the spur of the moment, that was something the king obviously gave to all those who came to the feast. But he refused to wear it. The story is this. Here’s a guy who says, “Yeah, I want Jesus. I want into the feast. I want salvation, but I’m not willing to wear the garment God provides. I’m not willing to wear the righteousness of Jesus. I want to stick with my own clothes.” You don’t get in that

way. But if you are willing to come His way, there's an invitation. Come. This is the heart of God. So, that's why it's important to be rooted in His character.

Secondly, it's important because it's "Demonstrated in Christ's Ministry" here on earth. You've thought about this. Jesus demonstrated that heart of hospitality in "Feeding the multitudes." Turn to Mark chapter 8 and you see the heart of Christ here so beautifully. Mark 8 verse 1:

In those days when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for the people because they've remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away hungry to their home, they'll faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance."

And so. Jesus ends up providing for all of these people miraculously. That's an expression of the heart of Jesus.

"He fed the disciples." In John 21, you remember after His resurrection, they're out in the boat laboring, and He wants to teach them a lesson, but He prepares breakfast for them on the shore. You say, "What's the spiritual message in that?" The spiritual message is Jesus' heart for His people.

"He freely accepted the hospitality of others." Jesus sanctioned and put His stamp of approval on hospitality by accepting it constantly during His ministry. He accepted it even from Pharisees who asked Him for a meal. He accepted it from Mary, Martha, and Lazarus often in their home. He accepted from Zacchaeus after His conversion in Luke 19. He accepted it from the Emmaus Road disciples who offered to have Him eat with them and even stay the night.

And "Jesus taught His apostles to accept hospitality from others." You remember in Matthew 10 when He sent them out, He said if someone invites you into their home to stay while you're ministering in that city, go, stay with them. And so, we see from the ministry of Jesus the stamp of approval on hospitality. He demonstrated it. He accepted it. He encouraged His followers to accept it.

Thirdly, we know it's important because it's "Commanded by God's Word." In the Old Testament, the word hospitality itself does not occur; however, this virtue still marks all true, spiritually mature believers. Let me just give you one: Job. Job is defending the fact that he hasn't sinned in some way, and that's not why he's suffering all he's suffering. And in defending that righteous character, he says this in Job 31:32, "The alien has not lodged outside, for I have opened my doors to the traveler." He's expressing the heart of a righteous person—hospitality, like our God. But, in the New Testament, we are explicitly commanded to practice hospitality. Let's turn back to Romans chapter 12. I mentioned it a moment ago, but you'll notice in verse 13, it's in the form of a participle but the structure points to an imperative. All of these are imperatives coming out of the command to love in verse 9. One expression of love is to practice hospitality. So, in form it's not a command, but in substance it is an imperative. It's a command. He says, "practice hospitality." The Greek word translated practice is literally "pursue." It means "to chase." It's used in other contexts of the chase like in wartime. You're chasing your enemy. It's used in contexts like chasing your prey when you're hunting a deer or whatever is you're hunting. In other words, we're not just to extend hospitality when we're asked, when we have to. No, we're to pursue it. We're to go out of our way to welcome and to care for Christians we don't know.

Turn over to Hebrews chapter 13. This is another command. Look at verse 2, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers." The Greek word translated neglect means "to be inattentive to; to overlook; to care nothing about." The writer of Hebrews says listen make sure you're not one of those who cares nothing about hospitality, caring for strangers. And he gives us a reason: "For (because) by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." Of course, obviously, referring back to Abraham in Genesis 18, Lot in Genesis 19, but he's implying that can still happen. It could happen in the first century. It could still happen today. So, don't neglect. Make sure you're attentive about this virtue.

Turn over to 1 Peter chapter 4. Another command. 1 Peter 4 verse 9: "Be hospitable to one another without complaint." Be hospitable. That's more than just

occasionally showing hospitality. No, it means make this your practice. Make sure this virtue describes your character. Be hospitable. And do it without complaint. Literally, the text says “without murmuring.” In other words, don’t do it sort of muttering under your breath wishing you didn’t have to be doing this. Do it with joy. Do it with cheerfulness. And he says, “Be hospitable to one another.” By one another here, he means “all Christians.” We’re to show hospitality to believers who are strangers to us. So, let me just apply that right here right now. We need to be hospitable to travelers who come into our community from outside our community. Every week we have folks who come to Countryside who are not part of this city, who don’t live here. We need to be hospitable. We need to be hospitable to visitors from within our community. Again, every week we have guests—the first time they’ve ever come to Countryside. We need to be “lovers of strangers.” This is a biblical virtue. This is a reflection of God. And, if I could apply it this way, we need to be hospitable to strangers who are within our own church. There are people in this church you don’t know. There are people in this church I don’t know, but I don’t want it to stay that way, and neither should you. And, of course, we should be hospitable to believers who we do know—and friends. It’s not ruling that out; it’s just saying that comes more naturally to everybody. We need to make sure we care about others. And, by the way, don’t show hospitality just to those who are like you and can benefit you. In fact, look at Luke 14. You need to see this. Jesus had been invited to have a meal, and He says this, verse 12:

Jesus went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends, or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return, and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Now Jesus isn’t saying don’t ever invite your friends. No, he’s saying make sure that in practicing hospitality you overcome social barriers. You don’t let those stand

in your way. Don't just invite people who are like you or who can benefit you. Hospitality is to be much broader than that. It's to be all those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of the differences.

We know the importance of this virtue, fourthly, because it is actually "Required to be Spiritually Mature." You see, being hospitable is "a qualification for elders." First Timothy chapter 3 verse 2, "An overseer must be hospitable." Titus 1:7 and 8: "The overseer must be hospitable." Now the fact that this is a qualification for elders means that the virtue of hospitality characterizes those who are spiritually mature, and that means, that it should be something you pursue. Every believer ought to be pursuing these qualities.

Also, even if you're not going to be in leadership, being hospitable is "a test of Christian character." In 1 Timothy 5, Paul's talking about the widows that ought to be supported by the church. He's saying they ought to be women who demonstrated Christian character. And guess what one of the things is? 1 Timothy 5:9 and 10: "A widow is to be put on the list only if she has shown hospitality to strangers." This is how spiritual maturity is demonstrated; how Christian character is demonstrated. So, you look at those reasons and you see that Scripture presents hospitality as uniquely important. Let's hurry on.

The fourth specific insight we need to know is "The Motivation for Hospitality." You see, to be the biblical virtue, it has to be done for the right reasons. What are those reasons? Well, there are a lot of wrong motives to practice hospitality. I mean you can do it to feed your pride. Either you want people to see how wonderful your house is or how great your food is. I mean there are a lot of bad reasons, right? You can do it in hope of a return. Jesus just commented on that in Luke 14. Some even think you earn your salvation in part by being hospitable. The Jewish rabbis taught that showing hospitality is one of the most meritorious works—one of the works that most merits the favor of God. Of course, that isn't true. Nothing we do merits God's grace or favor.

But what are the right motives for showing hospitality? Number one, we should practice hospitality "With a desire to imitate our Father." Ephesians 5:1 says, "Be

imitators of God, as beloved children.” In context, it’s talking about love like God loves, but obviously the implication is we are to imitate all the virtues of our God, including His generous, gracious hospitality.

Secondly, we should practice hospitality “Out of love for our Lord.” Turn with me to Matthew 25. This is a remarkable text. Jesus is describing a judgment. It’s called the “judgment of the nations,” a judgment that happens at the end of the seven-year Tribulation. It’s when all of those who survived the Tribulation will be judged. But notice how Jesus describes it. Verse 34: “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” Now first of all, I want you to notice that nothing these people do earns their way into God’s presence. Notice how He describes it, “You are blessed of My Father.” In other words, the only reason this is happening is because of the initiation of the Father. And you’re going to inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you from the foundation of the world—before you ever did anything to deserve it or not deserve it. So, you get in based on grace, not something you do. But how do you know if you’ve been changed? If your heart has been changed, you really are a Christian. Jesus goes on to describe it:

(verse 35) For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat;
I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger,
(here it is) and you invited Me in. (verse 37) The righteous will say,
“Lord, when did we do that? When (verse 38) did we see You a
stranger, and invite You in?” (verse 40) The King will answer and
say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one
of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me.”

You know what Jesus is saying? He’s saying, when we show hospitality to our brothers and sisters in Christ—those who are strangers to us but whom we love because of Christ, when we do that, we not only express our love to them but, in the end, we do it out of a motive to serve Christ Himself. It’s as if we are being hospitable to Him. And that’s how He sees it. So, we do it out of love for Christ Himself.

Thirdly, we should practice hospitality “Out of love for God’s people.” It’s very interesting that in all three of those passages I showed you where it is commanded—Romans 12, Hebrews 13, 1 Peter 4—in all three of those passages where hospitality is commanded, it’s connected to love. We saw it in Romans 12, right? Verse 9 says, “Love,” and there’s no object. It doesn’t say love God, love your neighbor; it just says, “Let your love be sincere.” Because in the rest of the passage Paul shows us that biblical love will have several objects including fellow Christians. And one of the ways we demonstrate our love for fellow Christians is by practicing hospitality. In Hebrews 13 verse 2 says, “Don’t neglect to show hospitality to strangers.” Guess what verse 1 says? It says, “Let love for the brethren continue.” Same thing in 1 Peter 4 verse 8. He says, “Keep fervent in your love for one another, (verse 9) being hospitable to one another.” We show hospitality not only out of love for Christ but love for God’s people.

Number four, we should practice hospitality “With the goal to advance the gospel.” I won’t turn there, but in 3 John verses 5 through 8 (you can look it up this afternoon or this week), but there we’re told to open our homes and hearts to people who are faithful ministers, who are missionaries, who are advancing the gospel. We need to open our hearts in hospitality for the advancement of the gospel.

Let me hurry on to a fifth and final specific insight we need to understand. And that is “The Application of Hospitality.” What do we do with this? I mean today’s hotels are plentiful, safe, affordable. Christians in our country aren’t being forced from their homes in persecution. So, what do we do? How can we obey this command? Let me just give you a few very practical suggestions that are based on the spirit of the New Testament texts we’ve looked at.

1) “Volunteer to host ministries of our church in your home that include people you don’t know.” That’s how they practiced hospitality in the first century. It was the entire church. You’re probably not going to have room for all of us in your home, but you can have a portion of us. Home Fellowships, Titus 2 groups, events connected to your Sunday School class or your ministry. Be open with your home.

2) “Volunteer to host Christians who travel in ministry.” We often have missionaries that need care. You can be part of the missionary care team in which you take care of the needs. You show hospitality to missionaries who are serving the Lord on our behalf. We have folks who come to our conference. Be thinking about them and how you can serve them.

3) “Pay for the food or hotel expenses of traveling Christians that you don’t know well, but whom you do learn might be in need.” That’s a way to show hospitality. But let’s come down to where the rubber meets the road. Let me give you some really practical ways day in and day out.

4) “Plan time on Sunday for meaningful interaction with other Christians.” In other words, don’t show up ten minutes after the service starts and leave the moment “amen” is said. How are you going to show hospitality? How are you going to treat the people around you as family, if that’s how you do every week? Listen, that’s not a Christian mindset. You may have learned that in a pragmatic church somewhere, or maybe you struggle with a heart of selfishness that says, “I just want my time, space, and privacy.” That’s not a biblical mindset. You need to love strangers. That’s a virtue you need to pursue this year. And one way to do that is to make time on the Lord’s Day to interact with people.

5) And this is key. The elders and I talked about this one. We really would encourage you on this one. “Every Sunday, intentionally introduce yourself to someone in our church that you don’t know.” Don’t just hang with the people you know and ignore everybody else. Christians are lovers of strangers. Practice that week in and week out. Introduce yourself to someone you don’t know.

6) “Make a habit of having meals with fellow believers, including those you don’t know.” Offer to take someone to lunch that you just met from our church. Or maybe they’re a guest. Occasionally, offer to take them to lunch. Invite church members to your home for a meal or dessert. It doesn’t have to be Martha Stewart worthy. Invite them for pizza and barbeque, whatever it is—something that your family enjoys. Just make this a practice like it’s always been true for the church. Don’t let the culture dictate this to you. Let the Bible dictate how you live as Christians. We need

to practice hospitality toward one another. But, let me finish with this. Here's the amazing thing. We will eternally enjoy God's hospitality. We'll live in His house as His adopted children forever. And we'll sit at His table. But here is the really amazing thing that I never get over. Jesus Himself will serve us. Luke 12 verse 37: "Blessed (Jesus says) are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that He will gird Himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and He will come up and wait on them." We will forever enjoy the hospitality of Jesus Christ our Lord. That's the reason we should practice it now.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for our time together. Thank you for the truth of Your Word. Lord, use it to shape us. Lord, don't let us be shaped by the mindset of the culture around us. Father, help us to think like Christians. Help us to have the mind of Christ as it's revealed on the pages of Scripture. And Father, I pray that You would help us individually and as a church to resolve this year to excel still more at loving strangers, loving believers that we don't know or don't know well—reaching out to them because it's an expression of Your great heart. Father, help us to not only make this resolution but by Your grace to keep it. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.